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THE CURRICULUM OF STUDY IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.¹

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By a curriculum is meant the subject-matter of study so arranged as to lead the pupil in an orderly fashion through that instruction and discipline for which all schools are established. The curriculum of the Sunday school must conform to this general conception. Its subjects of study must be so arranged that its students in the successive years may be given instruction and mental, moral, and religious discipline. He who would write upon this subject is confronted with a condition and not a theory. He must therefore, on the one side, while endeavoring to present ideals, be sensitive to the possibilities of the institution for which he prescribes subjects of study; and, on the other hand, he must not allow any discouragement due to facts as they are, to lead him to abandon his ideal for things as they should be.

The curriculum of a Sunday school is conditioned by the purpose for which a Sunday school exists. If the purpose be the mere giving of information, one sort of curriculum will be demanded; if its purpose be the awakening and the growth of the religious nature through the use of the Bible, then a very different sort of curriculum will be demanded. If such a religious purpose be recognized, there are still conditions that are regulative.

The curriculum to no small degree must be influenced by a decision as to whether the religious growth of the child is likely to be steady or marked by crises; whether it shall move on as steadily and as devoid of moral strength as in the case of his growth in mathematical process. In other words, shall instruction in the Sunday school ignore the fact that there is no moral growth without specific and conscious decisions; and that in many, if not in most, cases these decisions are not made in childhood, but in the period of adolescence, when almost

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of necessity they involve a greater or less inner struggle? Generally the boy or girl does not consciously enter upon a religious life without some moment of most intense introspection and struggle with his accumulated habits and concepts. Shall the curriculum recognize such moments? In a word, has conversion any pedagogical significance, and, if so, shall it exercise any influence upon the construction of a curriculum which, if properly taught, will hasten and normally direct the religious growth of the youth?

I hold that adolescent life, and the moment of crisis of moral and religious growth which we call conversion, are two elements that cannot be eliminated from religious pedagogy, and that therefore they must influence the curriculum. There are three possible curricula for Sunday schools as they now exist: (1) the uniform curriculum; (2) the graded-uniform curriculum; and (3) the graded curriculum.

I. The uniform curriculum. Nothing is easier than to discover faults in things that actually exist. If a statesman is a successful politician who has died, a utopia is a program which has never been given a chance to live. I can remember, as a very small boy, hearing my elders discuss the change from the system of Sunday-school lessons which had been prepared by the Sunday school itself to the system of uniform lessons which was to be used the world over. At that time, as I recall it, there was no small discussion of the advisability of the plan. Looking back over the thirty years of trial of these lessons, I am sure that no thoughtful person would question the wisdom of the decision which that church along with thousands of others made. The uniform system of lessons has been and still is of immeasurable value to the Christian world. Any attempt on the part of Christendom to destroy it, at least before we are ready to adopt a better system, would be nothing less than suicidal.

By the uniform system of lessons I mean precisely that system which is prepared by the International Sunday School Lesson Committee, and which is used by the vast majority of all Protestant Christian churches. That it falls short of being ideal, even as a uniform system, probably no one of its most ardent champions would question, while its advantages must be admitted by its most outspoken opponents. The question before us at this time is briefly to consider its actual pedagogical value. Of its ability to weld the Sunday schools into something like a unity, to concentrate the study of an entire world upon a given subject—in a word, of its general practicability, no one can have any doubt in the light of its history.

In my opinion the question is not that of destroying this form of curriculum, but of developing its possibilities and of guarding it so far as possible from inherent dangers. The uniform system has these pedagogic advantages: (1) it gives a definite lesson to an entire school; (2) it makes easy the holding of teachers' meetings for preparing the lesson of the next Sunday; (3) it provides a section of the Scripture of a length which may conveniently be handled in the time generally given to study in the Sunday school; (4) it makes possible the preparation of high-grade lesson-helps at the minimum of expense; (5) it enables the entire family to join in the study of the same lesson. The most serious objections which can be brought against it are: (1) its tendency toward atomism—that is to say, the presentation of bits of Scripture rather than the Scripture as a whole, and thus the breaking of any continuity of teaching; (2) its forcing students of different mental development to study the same lesson; (3) its failure to lead the pupil forward by successive years—that is to say, it lacks pedagogical movement; (4) its disregard of the period of spiritual crises.

These dangers may be in part met, in the first place, by so arranging the selections chosen for the lessons that, taken as a whole, they shall constitute literary units of some sort. Within the last few years this has obviously been the policy of those who have selected the lessons. Instead of miscellaneous selection of bits of material from different parts of the Bible, we have a tolerably continuous study of the different sections of the Bible. In the second place, the danger which arises from attempting to teach all the students one and the same lesson has been to some degree provided against by the adoption of methods which in some way adapt the lesson to the pupil. In the third place, the lack of progress may be, and to some degree has been, obviated by the adoption of cycles of lessons in which there is considerable actual progress in the lessons themselves, *i. e.*, for those pupils who start in with the beginning of the cycle. The fourth danger, so far as I am able to see, cannot be obviated by the uniform system; conversions will of course occur, but with small help from the curriculum. Especially is this true of those who come to the spiritual crisis in early maturity.

II. The semi-graded or graded-uniform curriculum. Years ago the most serious objection to the uniform system, namely, that it attempted to teach the same lesson to pupils of different mental and religious development, was recognized and considered. As a result of that consideration there were introduced into the Sunday schools

special lessons for very young children, and the lessons taught in the kindergarten and the lowest classes of the elementary departments were in reality detached from the uniform system as a whole. Thus there were created in a way two sets of uniform lessons, of a genuine graded nature: those intended for the infants, and those intended for all the other pupils.

Now the graded-uniform system as an ideal would carry this process one or two steps farther. Following the natural great division of growth, it would classify the pupils as children, adolescents, and mature—possibly making two subdivisions of the last, one including the young men and women, and the other the adults. Within each of these three or four divisions there would be a different lesson taught, but each division would have the same lesson—that is to say, there might be taught to the different classes of children the same Bible story, to all the classes of boys and girls the same lesson of biography or geography, to all the adult classes the same lesson of biblical teaching.

There can be no denying that for many schools this graded-uniform system has decided advantages both theoretically and practically over the merely uniform lessons. It preserves some of the advantages of the uniform system; it gives the great body of pupils of approximately the same age the lesson which is in a general way adapted to them, and at the same time does not tend to break down the unity of the school itself. Doubtless much can be done along these lines, and for many schools which wish to advance toward a genuinely graded curriculum this is unquestionably the step to be taken. For many years there have been on the market lesson-helps which make this possible. To-day as never before there are tendencies at work which make it altogether probable that the next step forward in the general Sunday-school world will be along the lines of the recognition of the threefold division of the Sunday school, and of the desirability of forming cycles of lessons prepared especially for each division.

III. The graded curriculum. To be idealistic is to believe in the final survival of the fittest. If the uniform system is essentially practical and the graded-uniform system practical, the graded system is practically ideal. Not impractically ideal, but as experience shows, *practically* ideal—if not for the majority, at least for the very respectable minority, of Sunday schools.

But to say that the Sunday school ought to have a graded curriculum is one thing; to show what that curriculum should be is another and a more difficult task. One is compelled to work here almost

without precedent or experience, and must fall back on general principles and analogies derived from secular education where a curriculum has already been worked out, aided by what little experience has already been had. Any attempts at the shaping of a course of study for the Sunday school must be regarded as tentative, and will undoubtedly be revised by experience. Nevertheless it seems necessary to make the attempt.

Yet right here the development of the college curriculum may furnish us a helpful suggestion. As the field of modern knowledge has grown and new subjects have knocked for admission at the door of the college curriculum, the colleges, as a rule, have not found it expedient either wholly to exclude them or to make room for them by excluding the older occupants. Room has been found for them by introducing the principle of election. The advantages of this method need be no more than hinted at here, some of them more marked in the case of the Sunday school than of the college. In the first place, the introduction of a wide range of subjects is an advantage even to those who are compelled to limit themselves to the same amount of work which they would otherwise have done. The necessity of choosing between different courses, or the knowledge that others are pursuing a different course from that which he is himself pursuing, broadens the pupil's horizon and in a valuable, though superficial, way increases his knowledge of the field of Bible study. Under an elective system, again, it is possible to adapt instruction more perfectly to individual needs. And, finally, it permits the student who will remain in the school year after year to be always moving forward to new subjects and new fields of study, and by this very fact tends to hold him in the school when otherwise he would drift away, feeling that he had gained all that the school had to give him.

But great as are the advantages of an elective system, the Sunday-school curriculum cannot, of course, be elective throughout. Aside from the fact that the majority of the pupils who have not reached adult age are quite unprepared to make a wise selection of courses, it is evident that there are some fundamental things which all need to learn and which must be learned as the basis of more advanced elective study.

At this point one may well utilize the experience gained under a system of uniform lessons. For a generation Christendom has been instructing its children and youth in what earnest men have designated as material that should be known by all Christians. The system,

pedagogically considered, is exposed to many objections. But, in that it has demanded that all should know something, and in so far as it has required that this something should include the essential elements of the biblical material, it points the way for further progress. Whatever failures may have followed the attempt to make this system of uniform lessons permanent rather than introductory to something better, its efficiency and effects at this point enforce the desirability of seeing that sooner or later all pupils study the same lessons.

From such considerations as these it results, then, that the first part of the course must be prescribed, the latter part elective. Where the line should be drawn may be matter of doubt, but perhaps no better arrangement can be made than this: for the years corresponding to the elementary and secondary divisions of the secular education—that is, approximately, from the sixth to the eighteenth year of the pupil's life—let the course be prescribed; for the subsequent years let it be elective.

What then shall be the governing principle of the prescribed course? Four factors must be taken into account: the years of the pupil's life during which he is pursuing this course; the fundamental principles of biblical study based on the nature of the Bible; the fact that the prescribed courses are all that will be pursued in common by all the pupils, and that they must therefore serve as the basis of the future diversified work; and the fact of the spiritual crises.

As respects the first point, it must be remembered that the majority of the pupils who pursue the prescribed course will be in the same year advancing through the elementary and secondary schools in their secular education. In the latter part of this period they will be pupils in the high school, and their course will include the study of history, in all cases the history of the United States, in a large proportion of cases that of some other country also, as of England, or of Egypt, Greece and Rome.

As respects the second point, we hold that the deepest insight into and broadest outlook upon the meaning of the Bible, the truest conception of the basis of its authority, is to be gained by a thoroughly historical study of it. It is through the biblical history in the broadest sense of the term that the divine revelation is most clearly revealed and most clearly seen to be divine. But if this be so, then, in view of the third consideration named above, the prescribed course should culminate, intellectually speaking, in a broad historical view of the Bible.

Yet it is equally manifest that it cannot begin where it ends. Facts in isolation must precede facts in relation. And the work of the elementary division must be in no small measure the acquisition by the pupil of those facts which in the latter portion of his prescribed course are to form the basis of a true historical study. Still more needful is it to remember that in these earlier years the child is susceptible to religious impressions, and that the instruction should be such as to lodge in his mind, or rather impress on his heart, the elemental principles of religion and conduct. We come, therefore, to the conclusion that the prescribed course, covering the ten to fourteen years of the elementary and secondary divisions—approximately the years from six to eighteen in the pupil's life—should begin with the simpler stories of the Bible and the more elementary truths of biblical teaching, and should move toward and aim at the acquisition of a systematic knowledge of biblical history, including in this term the history and interpretation both of events and of teachings.

The fourth fact, that of the occurrence of the spiritual crises, demands that the subjects of study should be adjusted to the stages of spiritual growth as shown by statistics. Speaking generally, these crises come in the period of early adolescence and of early maturity. The lessons intended for such periods should be therefore especially adapted to move the pupil to correct spiritual decision. In the case of boys and girls, such lessons should be biographical. In the case of young men and women, the crisis being more intellectual in character, the lessons should be both biographical and doctrinal.

IV. These considerations suggest the following general scheme for a graded curriculum:

1. In the kindergarten the instruction must of course be *viva voce*. The aim of the teacher must be to lodge in the hearts of the little children some of the elemental principles of morality and religion. Obviously this cannot be done abstractly. Stories from the Bible and from the children's own experiences will serve as media by which to convey or suggest the truth, and the child should at once be given opportunity to express in play or picture work his idea of the truth which has been presented to him.

2. In the first three years after the kindergarten the aim should be to lodge in the memory of the child such stories from the Bible as will interest and profit him, and certain of the choicer sentences or verses of the Bible, such as will make upon his mind now an impression of spiritual truth, and will be treasured in the memory in after life.

Pictures and other illustrative apparatus must be freely used, and all the teaching must be skilfully brought into connection with the child's own life. To this end stories from other literature than the Bible, and from life, may be freely used by the teacher. The religious and ethical aim must be constantly kept in mind along with the purpose of storing the pupil's memory.

The plan upon which these stories should be arranged deserves more careful study than it has yet received. An obvious division would be to devote one year to stories from the life of Jesus, a second to stories from the Old Testament, and a third to stories from the lives of the apostles. But it is probable that a topical arrangement on the basis of the ethical and religious ideas to be inculcated would be better, and that more account should be taken of the seasons of the year and the festivals of the church, such as Christmas and Easter, than a purely biographical grouping would permit. Neither the chronological nor the biographical motive appeals very strongly to pupils at this age. Nor, indeed, is it necessary to compel them to arrange details in any schematic order.

3. The child who has, in the preceding three years, heard many of the stories from the lips of the teacher, and has, it is to be hoped, had many of them read to him at home, has presumably by this time learned to read for himself. It is time, therefore, that he should begin to learn something about the books of the Bible, as a preparation to the study of them from the printed page. A year may very profitably be given to the study of the Bible as a collection of books, a library. The children should learn from specimens of each kind the different kinds of books which the Bible contains, as for example books of history and stories, of law, of sermons, of poetry and wisdom, of letters and of vision. Home readings from books of each class may be assigned, the co-operation of the parents being secured. Passages of Scripture notable for their content and beauty, such as the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, choice Psalms, sayings of Jesus and the apostles, should be committed to memory. The names of the books of the Bible may be learned by classes, and in the order in which they are printed in the Bible, with the intent that the children may be able to turn readily to any one of them. The primary and controlling aim should be to give the pupil a knowledge of the varied contents of the biblical library, of the arrangement of the books in the Bible, and above all to give him a genuine interest in them which will impel him and prepare him to study them farther.

4. The pupil who, in the kindergarten and during the first three years after leaving it, has had lodged in his memory many of the Bible stories disconnectedly and without reference to their historical order, and who has spent a year in gaining a general knowledge of the contents of the whole biblical library, including, perhaps with some special emphasis, the books of history and story, may now profitably pass on to biographical study. In such study the unit is no longer the story, detached and isolated, but the life of the individual whether patriarch, prophet, king, apostle, or Christ. The pupil being now able to read, the books of the Bible should themselves be his chief text-book, whatever aids to the use of them it may be expedient to put into his hands. This portion of the curriculum may perhaps also occupy three years.

5. At this point in the curriculum the pupil, having had three years of stories, a year in a general survey of the books of the Bible, and three years of biographical study, may properly take up the continuous and more thorough study of single biblical books. Three years may be given to this kind of study. The aim should be to give the pupil an intelligent idea of the content and, as far as he is prepared for it, of the structure and character of certain biblical books. These books are the sources of the history which he is to take up in the succeeding four years. It being impossible to study thoroughly the whole of the literature, typical examples should be selected for study. But that the pupil may nevertheless gain a genuine, even though general knowledge of the contents of the whole Bible, there should be laid out for him a three-years' course of reading, covering all the books of the Bible not taken up for thorough study.

6. In the last four years of the prescribed course the aim should be to give the student a connected idea of biblical history, including both events and teaching, and these in their mutual relations; in short, a comprehensive survey of the history of biblical revelation, from the first recorded beginnings in the most ancient times down to the end of the apostolic age.

This course of fourteen years might be accomplished by the brightest pupils in somewhat less time. Each class pursuing its work independently might go rapidly or slowly, according to ability; and individual pupils might carry on two courses at once, thus shortening the course to twelve, or even ten, years.

7. When the pupil has completed his prescribed course, covering the twelve years or so of the elementary and secondary divisions, he will pass into the adult division, where elective courses, sufficient to

occupy him the rest of his life, may easily be offered, if only competent teachers can be provided. All the books of the Bible may be taken up for literary and interpretative study; the several periods of biblical history may be studied in greater detail than before; the whole field of biblical theology and biblical ethics is open; and there seems to be no valid reason why courses in applied ethics, personal and sociological, as well as courses in the history of the church, ancient and modern, especially the history of missions, should not be offered here also.

These seven propositions yield something like the following:

CURRICULUM.

I. ELEMENTARY DIVISION.

1. The kindergarten.
2. Three years of stories, pictures, and verses, the chief basis of grouping being probably that of the ethical and religious ideas to be inculcated.
3. One year of general study of the books of the Bible: elementary biblical introduction, accompanied by reading of appointed portions and the memorizing of selected passages.
4. Three years of biographical study:

Fifth year:	The life of Jesus.
Sixth year:	Lives of Old Testament heroes.
Seventh year:	The lives of the apostles.

II. SECONDARY DIVISION.

1. Three years in the study of the books of the Bible:

Eighth year:	First half—1 Samuel.
	Second half—The gospel of Mark.
Ninth year:	First half—Isaiah, chaps. 1-12.
	Second half—Acts, chaps. 1-12.
Tenth year:	First half—The Psalms.
	Second half—1 Peter; Acts, chaps. 13-28.
2. Four years of biblical history:

Eleventh year:	Old Testament history begun.
Twelfth year:	Old Testament history completed.
Thirteenth year:	The life and teachings of Jesus.
Fourteenth year:	The history and teachings of the apostolic age.

III. ADULT DIVISION.

Elective courses:

1. The interpretation and literary study of the several books of the Bible.
2. Biblical ethics and theology.
3. Biblical history, more detailed than before.
4. Church history.
5. Christian doctrine.